

Waiting to Exhale

Trusting God When You're Stuck in a System You Can't Control

Acts 25:1–27

Focus: Paul is trapped in a web of political delay and power plays, held without charges and examined without resolution. And yet, he doesn't panic. He remains poised, anchored by God's promises. This study invites believers to breathe deeply in seasons of uncertainty, to trust divine timing when justice seems deferred, and to rest in the assurance that God sees and God is working.

I. Why This Study?

A. Objective:

1. To explore how Paul navigates prolonged injustice without losing composure or confidence in God
2. To consider the faith required when earthly systems fail to deliver fairness or clarity
3. To learn how to hold hope when the path forward is delayed by forces outside of our control

B. Relevance:

1. Many believers live or serve within systems that seem indifferent to justice, fairness, or truth
2. Bureaucracy, prejudice, corruption, or political self-interest can frustrate even the most faithful intentions
3. This passage offers a spiritual framework for holding on to peace, purpose, and trust when caught in the slow churn of human institutions

II. Context of Acts 25:1–27

A. The Background

1. Two years after Paul's initial trial, a new governor named Festus arrives in Caesarea.
2. The Jewish leaders waste no time in reviving their request to have Paul transferred to Jerusalem, hoping to _____ and _____ him along the way.
3. Festus, wishing to maintain good relations with the Jewish elite, suggests a trial in Jerusalem.

4. Paul refuses and appeals to Caesar, exercising his right as a _____ citizen to have his case heard before the emperor.
5. Later, King Agrippa and his sister Bernice arrive to pay respects to Festus. Festus, uncertain about the specifics of Paul's case, invites Agrippa to hear Paul and help determine what charges, if any, should be written to Rome.
6. The case remains _____. Paul is still _____. Justice is still _____. And yet, Paul's resolve remains _____.

B. Historical and Cultural Insight:

1. In Acts 25–26, the relationship between Festus and Agrippa shows the intersection of Roman _____ authority and Jewish _____ influence.
2. Festus, the newly appointed Roman governor, has the legal power to judge cases but admits he does not understand the religious issues behind Paul's trial.
3. Agrippa II, though not ruling Judea directly, holds authority over the Temple and is recognized as an expert in Jewish customs and disputes. When Agrippa and his sister Bernice visit Festus, the governor seizes the opportunity to consult him, both to gain clarity on Paul's charges and to have help framing the case for Caesar.
4. Their interaction reflects both political _____ and practical _____ : Festus seeks legitimacy in handling a sensitive case, while Agrippa uses the occasion to display his knowledge and authority.
5. Luke presents them as collaborative observers, yet their combined verdict is clear—Paul has done _____ deserving death or imprisonment (26:31–32).
6. Theologically, their partnership shows how God uses even secular and political relationships to provide Paul a wider platform to testify of Christ, fulfilling Jesus' promise that His followers would bear witness before _____ and _____ (Luke 21:12–13).

C. Key Takeaway:

When systems stall and people delay, when justice is tangled in politics and motives are mixed, the faithful can still stand tall. Paul shows us how to breathe with God's timing, trust His higher court, and resist the urge to despair.

III. What Can We Learn When We're Stuck in an Unjust System?

A. People Will Protect Politics Before Principle (vv. 1–5)

1. The Jewish leaders immediately request that Paul be transferred back to Jerusalem. Their motive is not legal _____ but _____ intent. Festus, newly appointed and eager to maintain peace with the local leaders, entertains the request but insists they come to Caesarea instead.
2. The Greek word *charin*, meaning favor or grace, is used in verse 3 to describe what they were seeking from Festus. They weren't asking for _____; they were asking for political favor. Paul's life is at risk, not because of a lawful offense, but because of alliances and appearances.
3. In our own lives, we often face systems where decisions are made not on the basis of what is right, but on what is _____ or politically _____. Like Paul, we must learn to discern when to engage and when to appeal to a higher authority. Truth is not always the top priority in systems that prize control and consensus.

B. There Is Strength in Knowing Your Rights and Knowing Your God (vv. 6–12)

1. When Festus proposes a trial in Jerusalem, Paul wisely refuses. He understands both the _____ and the _____ afforded to him as a Roman citizen.
2. His statement, "I appeal to Caesar," uses the phrase *Kaisara epikaloumai*, a legal declaration that shifted jurisdiction from local to imperial court. This was not a faithless move, but a _____ one, showing that spiritual people must also be _____ people.
3. More than that, Paul is demonstrating what it means to remain poised under pressure. His calm assertion of rights and his refusal to be manipulated remind us that God calls us to be both _____ and _____.
4. The faithful do not have to be _____. Knowing when to speak and how to act is a form of spiritual maturity.

C. Delayed Justice Does Not Mean Divine Absence (vv. 13–22)

1. Festus admits to Agrippa that he is at a loss about how to handle Paul. He says, "I found he had done nothing deserving of death." The phrase *ouden axion thanatou*, meaning nothing worthy of death, echoes the earlier declarations made by Roman officials in Luke's Gospel.
2. It reminds us that God can make even political rulers bear witness to the _____ of the righteous.

3. Still, Paul is not released. He remains imprisoned while Festus searches for the right words to justify a process that lacks legitimacy. This scene mirrors the ways our own institutions often prolong _____ through _____. Yet God is not absent in these delays.
4. As Dr. Mitzi J. Smith writes, “God is not waiting for systems to align before God acts. God is already at work, subverting from within and strengthening from below.”

D. God’s Purpose Continues Even When You Are Stalled (vv. 23–27)

1. Paul’s audience expands. What began as a _____ examination becomes a _____ hearing. Agrippa, Bernice, Roman officials, and military commanders all gather to hear Paul’s story. What seemed like a _____ becomes a _____. What looked like a _____ becomes a _____.
2. Festus admits in verse 26, “I have nothing definite to write to my lord about him.” The Greek word *asphales*, meaning secure or clear, highlights how the empire’s mechanisms are unsure while God’s servant is certain. Paul is imprisoned, but his clarity is _____. His faith is _____. His voice is _____.
3. Sometimes God allows the delays to widen your witness. What seems like a season of waiting may actually be a season of _____. While others fumble with politics and paperwork, God is preparing hearts for the message that only you can deliver.

IV. Scholars’ and Theological Insights on Trusting God Within Systems

- A. Dr. Esau McCaulley: “Christianity began as a faith that engaged the empire without bowing to it. Paul’s witness under Roman jurisdiction reminds us that we don’t need the system to save us in order to speak with courage inside it.”
- B. Dr. Renita J. Weems: “God’s silence is not absence. There is a faith that breathes, waits, and still believes when nothing seems to move.”
- C. John Wesley: “The world is my parish, but the prison can be my pulpit. So long as Christ is known, no confinement can confine the gospel.”
- D. Dr. Reggie Williams: “Faith in Jesus equips believers not only to endure injustice but to resist despair. Hope is a practice as much as a belief.”

E. Dr. Cheryl Sanders: “Delays in deliverance do not invalidate God’s promise. They train the soul in persistence, patience, and prophetic perspective.”

V. Prayer Focus

1. Pray for clarity when navigating unjust systems or difficult delays
2. Ask God for wisdom to speak up, act wisely, and discern your next steps
3. Seek strength to resist discouragement when others use power irresponsibly
4. Intercede for all who are stuck in cycles of delay, waiting for breakthrough or justice

VI. Key Takeaway

When earthly systems stall and justice feels elusive, believers can still exhale in faith. God sees. God knows. God acts. And even in seasons of delay, the mission is still unfolding.

VII. Discussion and Reflection Questions

1. When have you felt stuck in a system that you could not control? How did you respond spiritually and practically?
2. How does Paul’s refusal to go to Jerusalem model healthy boundaries and strategic faith?
3. What does it mean to rest in God’s promises even when you see no movement?
4. How can the delays in your life be platforms for witness rather than only sources of frustration?
5. What habits help you maintain peace when human leadership seems unclear or unjust?